INTERCULTURAL DEVELOPMENT RESEARCH ASSOCIATION

IDRA Newsletter

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Literature in Early Childhood

by José L. Rodríguez

Inside this Issue:

When an infant shows excitement over pictures in a storybook, when a two-year old scribbles with a crayon, and when a four-year old points out letters on a street sign – they are signaling their growing literacy development. But a devastatingly large number of people in the United States cannot read as they need to for success in life.

A few weeks ago, the Intercultural Development Research Association (IDRA) was working with a group of middle school students who are part of the IDRA Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program. The session was based on children's literature. The goal was to teach the tutors how to read to their pre-kindergarten and kindergarten tutees.

Before the lesson, the middle school students were asked to raise their hands if they liked to read. Out of 20 students only five raised their hands. Those five students said they like to read everything from poetry to non-fiction.

The majority of those who did not raise their hands said that reading is boring. They felt forced to read their books in order to complete assignments. These students stated that they liked to read when they were younger, but all that changed for them as they got older and the reading became more complicated.

This article, will describe how to use literature and storytelling to activate prior knowledge and stimulate curiosity and ultimately help students begin to think critically. The reading strategies outlined are drawn from IDRA's Project FLAIR (Focusing on Language and Academic Instructional Renewal).

Making Reading Meaningful

When students' prior knowledge is activated and their curiosity is stimulated, they begin to make positive associations to reading. When students can make connections between what is being read and real life situations, they begin to think critically. It is only when students take ownership of what is being read that they develop a love for reading. Reading is then meaningful to them.

In many instances students are presented with a book or a story without any pre-reading activities. Students do

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not know what it is that they are looking or listening for, and they soon become bored and disengaged in a lesson.

This disengagement leads to discipline problems. Through the negative responses from the teacher, students are turned off to reading. They associate reading with boredom and the negative experience. A love for literacy can develop only through positive experiences (Burns, Griffin and Snow, 1999).

Pre-Reading Strategies

IDRA's Project FLAIR is a professional development program created to transform the way we teach *all* learners, including those who are linguistically diverse. FLAIR adapts itself to the reading materials already in the school while encouraging teachers to explore the rich diversity of children's literature available to them. It is a philosophy of valuing students and teachers and an approach to encouraging them to think for themselves as they teach and learn.

It is only when students take ownership of what is being read that they develop a love for reading. Reading is then meaningful to them.

The instructional approaches modeled in IDRA's training and technical assistance activities for FLAIR stress all four language skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing), not just reading. They help schools create integrated language arts programs that use a comprehensive literacy approach and that build on the strengths of diverse learners.

The use of the FLAIR strategies gives students ownership of the literature they are reading. Many of the pre-kindergarten and kindergarten students IDRA has worked with demonstrate a love for reading after the lesson has been taught. The students often request more lessons and seldom forget the previous ones.

When using a FLAIR lesson in the early childhood classroom, students are constantly moving from one task to another never allowing for disengagement from the lesson. Students are encouraged to discuss and express their opinions, allowing for oral language development.

Research reveals that the children most at risk for reading difficulties in the primary grades are those who began school with less verbal skills, less phonological awareness, less letter knowledge, and less familiarity with basic purposes and mechanisms of reading (Burns, Griffin and Snow, 1999).

During the lessons, before a story is introduced, the teacher, poses pre-reading questions to the students. Students are then paired with a partner and asked what they think about the questions. They are given an opportunity to share their responses and engage in dialogue.

From all of the dialogue, students are grouped in teams of four and are asked to draw a group picture (prediction) of what they think the

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In This Issue...

The Intercultural Development Research Association *(IDRA)* is a non-profit organization with a 501(c)(3) tax exempt status. The purpose of the organization is to disseminate information concerning equality of educational opportunity.

The *IDRA Newsletter* (ISSN 1069-5672, © 2003) serves as a vehicle for communication with educators, school board members, decision-makers, parents, and the general public concerning the educational needs of all children in Texas and across the United States.

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Reading Right, Reading Well

by Bradley Scott, Ph.D.

Little Olivia approached an educator one day in the neighborhood after having finished a wonderful day at school. "Mr. Bradley!" she exclaimed with an excitement he had rarely seen from her in all of her six years. "I read a book today. I read a book today at my school!" Of course, he congratulated her with the same amount of wonder and excitement as she displayed in telling him of her great success.

Her little brother was looking and appeared to feel left out. The man said to him, "And Tre [pronounced "Tray" – his name is Neal, the third in his family], what did you read today?"

Olivia, being the big sister that she is and knowing everything at the age of six, chimed right in, "Oh he can't read, he's only in preschool."

Tre looked absolutely defeated. "Well of course he can read," the man said in his defense. "He can read, and I'm sure he does it very well."

Tre just beamed as the man went on to explain to Olivia that he reads what he can right now in a way that he is able. He sees certain signs and symbols and they mean something to him. "You see, Olivia, that's what reading is."

As you can imagine, the man got the biggest hug from Tre. He had saved him from absolute humiliation and defeat.

Creating Classrooms of Excellence

If we are going to save our children from the humiliation and defeat of not being successful in school, if we are going to ensure that they are not left behind, we are going to need to support their learning in *classrooms of excellence*. I have a vision for classrooms of excellence that I have been developing over the last few months with feedback from my colleagues at the Intercultural Development Research Association.

Since the President signed into law the *No Child Left Behind Act* reauthorizing the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act*, it seems that classrooms of excellence at the preschool and early elementary levels are needed now more than ever. The Early Reading First portion of the law makes the point that early language, literacy, and pre-reading development of preschool-age children must occur in "high-quality language and literature rich environments, so that children can attain the fundamental knowledge and skills necessary for optimal reading development in kindergarten and beyond."

Preschool children must be

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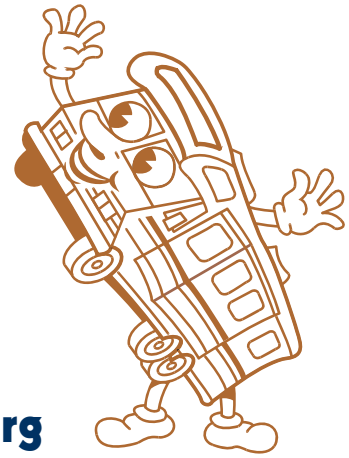
Take the IDRA Newsletter Field Trip!

On IDRA's Web Site

- Read related *IDRA Newsletter* articles from 1996 to the present
- Access statistics, definitions, etc.
- Learn about Internet resources
- Find extensive useful Internet links
- Use IDRA's topical index to find what you are looking for



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exposed to scientifically-based language and literacy activities that are age-appropriate and that develop letter recognition, phonemic awareness, letter-sound recognition or phonics, language fluency, and text comprehension.

Classrooms of excellence should have a minimum of eight elements addressed if preschool learners are going to benefit from academically-powerful learning environments that prepare them appropriately for kindergarten and beyond. The eight elements are outlined below.

A Vision for Classrooms of Excellence

Staffing

Most (at least 80 percent) of the teachers in these classrooms have an associate of arts degree, and the director has a bachelor's degree.

- Teachers have a concentration in early childhood education.
- All teachers have a minimum of a CDA credential.

Educational

All children are given access, inclusion, appropriate treatment, opportunity to learn, and appropriate resources to support learning regardless of the economic circumstance, English-language learning level, disability, race, and gender (Dieckmann and Villarreal, 2001; Scott, 2000).

- Every child receives a high quality education.
- High quality teaching and a dynamic curriculum is evident.
- Total access to oral language development and phonological, alphabet, and print awareness.
- The learning experience is inclusive not exclusive.
- Learning is individualized to student characteristics.
- Necessary and sufficient resources support student learning.

Did You Know?

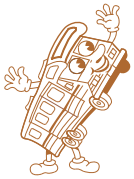
Myths about literacy development

Myth #1: Oral language must develop before written language can begin.
Although oral language development is essential to good written language development, it is not a prerequisite in the way once believed. Oral and written language skills develop simultaneously, with each supporting the other.

Myth #2: Children learn oral language naturally, but acquire literacy knowledge through direct instruction.
We tend to overestimate the extent to which oral language learning simply unfolds through maturation, regardless of social circumstances, while we underestimate the extent to which written language learning can occur in day-to-day functional contexts starting long before children receive formal instruction in the classroom.

Myth #3: Children must achieve a certain level of physical and mental readiness before written language learning can occur.
Variations in rates of literacy development are due primarily to individual differences in children's learning rates rather than to differences in children's early literacy experiences.

Schickedanz, J. A. *Much More Than the ABCs: The Early Stages of Reading and Writing* (Washington, D.C.: National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1999).



For more facts and statistics, go the "Field Trip" on IDRA's web site.

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Accountability

All education stakeholders, including parents, hold themselves and each other responsible for creating classrooms of excellence that support academic success of children where learning and literacy is concerned (Robledo Montecel, 2001; Scott, 2002).

- Everyone understands and executes their responsibility for student learning and reading readiness.
- Each stakeholder helps to build an appropriate educational environment and experience.

Teacher Expectations

Young children are expected to complete high school and can choose the option for continuing to college.

- This expectation is that children will be ready to read in kindergarten.
- This expectation is clearly and continually communicated to young children.
- The actions of teachers and other adults reflect this expectation.
- The reading success expectation is reflected in the curriculum and classroom activities.
- Children's reading efforts and successes are celebrated by adult stakeholders.
- Children are supported to celebrate and joyfully hold high expectations for their own genuine effort and success.

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Academic Achievement

Young children are ready to begin and succeed upper-level schooling after acquiring the necessary prerequisite skills in literacy (i.e., phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and text comprehension) and other academic areas.

- Kindergarten reading readiness and appropriate numeracy preparation are successfully demonstrated on classroom assessments and measurements.
- Student effort and high student outcomes reflect a belief in the possible appropriately transformed into the reality of demonstrated high performance.
- Children successfully achieve at the highest level of excellence in reading and numeracy readiness.

Social Maturity

Young children have been trained and receive guidance in self discipline to manage their learning individually and in groups in a way that creates personal and shared academic success and prepares them to move to higher levels of achievement.

- Children learn to manage their own lives in school and beyond.
- Children learn to cooperate and work with others.
- Children learn to practice resilience and perseverance.
- Children learn academic goal setting and goal reaching.
- Children joyfully embrace learning and literacy as a key to their own success.

Classroom Management

The system and structures of organization in the classroom and the human, mechanical, and technical supports for learning, as well as all of the interactive dimensions of the classroom's operation are aligned and integrated in a manner to support student achievement and excellence and the appropriate acquisition of skills and competencies for academic success.

- Classroom curriculum and learning experiences are organized and structured for success.
- Human, mechanical, and technical supports for learning and literacy are aligned, articulated, and integrated to support reading readiness success.
- Curriculum is organized to engage the learner in oral language development, phonological, alphabet, and print awareness.
- The learning environment is print rich and provides meaningful, challenging, creative and joyful reading readiness opportunities in every learning or interest space.

Parent Participation

Parents are embraced as an integral part of classrooms of excellence where they work collaboratively with teachers and other staff in schools and/or homes in support of schools to create and build opportunities for academic excellence and success for their children.

- Parents reinforce learning at home.
- Parents actively engage in building their own English-language competency and proficiency.
- Teachers and parents collaborate on building children's reading readiness and school success.
- Parents are engaged to participate in classroom planning.
- Parents are presented with opportunities to participate in the learning experiences in classrooms.
- With teacher assistance, parents review student performance outcome data and plan for continued learning achievement and success.

In such a classroom of excellence, young Tre would develop all the skills he needs for kindergarten and beyond. I have decided that I am going to do something for the Tres of the world. I am going to meet with fellow educators, parents, and folks in general to see what we can finally do to transform preschool classrooms from good to great to excellent.

Oh, by the way, there are some less-than-good and even bad classrooms that do little to nothing to prepare learners for kindergarten and beyond. We shall be looking for you. You see, Tre could not stomach the humiliation and defeat you might inadvertently try to heap upon him by your less than desirable instructional practices and learning environments.

Before his disappointment causes him to wreak havoc on you and your classroom, we are going to work really hard to save it and you, by transforming it and you, if you need it. You see, Tre really wants to read right and read well. Even at his tender age, he already knows how important it is. He is eager. He is anxious. He is ready to learn to read.

Resources

Dieckmann, J., and A. Villarreal. "Enriching Your Classroom Through Equitable Technology Integration," *IDRA Newsletter* (San Antonio, Texas: Intercultural Development Research Association, May 2001).

Robledo Montecel, M., and J.D. Cortez, A. Cortez. "Successful Bilingual Education Programs: Student Assessment and Outcomes," *IDRA Newsletter* (San Antonio, Texas: Intercultural Development Research Association, October 2001).

Scott, B. "We Should Not Kid Ourselves: Excellence Requires Equity," *IDRA Newsletter* (San Antonio, Texas: Intercultural Development Research Association, February 2000).

Scott, B. "Who's Responsible, Who's to Blame?" *IDRA Newsletter* (San Antonio, Texas: Intercultural Development Research Association, May 2002).

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The Intercultural Development Research Association Presents

The Project Alianza Networking Conference

Showcasing Success

March 5-6, 2003
University of Texas at San Antonio
Downtown Campus

Project Alianza "Showcasing Success" is for educators involved in teacher preparation programs, primarily those preparing bilingual teachers, ESL teachers and teachers working with diverse student populations.

As the number of Latino youth in the United States increases, there is a critical shortage of prepared and certified people to teach students who are learning English. Project Alianza is responding to the needs of this increasingly diverse student population enabling universities to target three groups of prospective bilingual education teachers:

- ★ Bilingual or ESL teacher aides,
- ★ Students in traditional bilingual teacher-preparation programs, and
- ★ Normalistas, teachers trained in México who are legal residents of the United States.

Participants will...

- ★ Learn how Project Alianza has helped participating universities **increase** their **pool of potential bilingual and ESL teachers**.
- ★ Experience how participating universities have successfully worked to **improve the admissions and curriculum** for bilingual and ESL teachers in their institutions.
- ★ Learn how U.S. institutions have formed **binational partnerships** with Mexican teacher preparation programs to improve their understanding of the growing ESL populations and to improve their teacher preparation programs.
- ★ Get information on how institutions **organize, implement and fund** Project Alianza.
- ★ Explore opportunities to **implement** the Project Alianza model.

Keynote presentation
by Consuelo Castillo Kickbusch

- ★ **Receive publications** about lessons learned in Project Alianza and research related to teacher preparation in the United States and México.

In 1998, IDRA and the Mexican and American Solidarity Foundation formulated the idea of Alianza. With funding for five years from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, IDRA in collaboration with nine major universities created a model teacher preparation and leadership development program. Alianza is already making a difference in the lives of those who are a part of it.

Co-sponsored by the University of Texas at San Antonio, College of Education and Human Development, Division of Bicultural-Bilingual Studies.

Hotel Information

Radisson Hotel San Antonio
Downtown Market Square
502 W. Durango Blvd.
San Antonio, Texas 78207
210-224-7155

The hotel is offering a special rate of **$89** per night for a single or double room (plus state and local taxes), based on availability. The hotel reservation deadline for the reduced rate is February 19, 2003. Call 210-224-7155 to make reservations. Be sure to reference the IDRA Project Alianza networking conference in order to qualify for the special rate.

The Home as a Significant Source for Developing Language and Study Skills

Fifteen Tips for Families

by Abelardo Villarreal, Ph.D., and Rosana G. Rodríguez, Ph.D.

IDRA believes that the education business is family business. Twenty years ago, psychologist Urie Bronfenbrenner was asked what children needs to be strong and healthy. His answer was, "Lots of time with an adult who's crazy about [them]" (Byrne, 1996).

His answer is as true now as it was then. This article recognizes that parents and families are a child's first teachers, through the informal learning that takes place in the home to prepare a child for school success and lifelong learning.

As a complement to "formal" instruction in school, this article offers recommendations for families to support language, literacy and study skills from an early age, through loving interaction and focused skill building at home. During the early years, children are not only learning knowledge and skills at home and in school, but they also are acquiring dispositions toward reading and learning that will last a lifetime (Gottfried, 1983; Katz, 1985; Elkind, 1987; Katz and Chard, 1989).

Premises for Parent Involvement

Parent involvement in the education of their children is based on three premises. First, parents are an important resource for teachers because they have valuable information about their children that is essential in planning meaningful educational experiences. Teachers who take advantage of parents as a resource see the benefits of expanding on assets and strengths that children already bring to school.

Second, parents and educators share a common goal – to develop children's social and academic skills to make choices and compete equitably in this society. Successful teaching requires the collaboration of a team composed of administrators, teachers, specialists and parents with very distinct roles and responsibilities. Together, the team establishes a vision, sets goals, and defines what the individual members' roles and responsibilities will be. The team meets periodically to review progress and holds itself accountable for the educational success of children.

Third, parents are taxpayers whose money is used to purchase the most beneficial educational services that will result in a positive impact on their children.

When we see parent involvement from this perspective, we will witness great educational strides in *all* children. Schools and parents must partner and work together in a manner that values and respects the important contributions of parents and families. Furthermore, it is of mutual benefit for educators and families to collaborate and plan together to leverage each partner's contributions to the educational process for the ultimate benefit of children.

Recommendations for Families

With the advent of pencil and paper tests and their importance in defining school accountability, reading has become pivotal in measuring student academic success. Without a good handle in reading, children are not able to do well on tests. Parents expect schools to assume leadership in assuring that their children succeed. Parents also expect schools to initiate efforts to engage them in this event.

The home's potential as a significant source for developing language skills has not traditionally been given much importance. But studies show that families play a vital role in the social, cultural, and linguistic development of children.

Following are recommendations for parents and families to help make the home a valuable teaching resource where children are constantly acquiring and practicing language, learning, and study skills.

Strengthen your relationship with your children and bond as a

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caring and responsible family. A close family wants every member to succeed and challenges each other to reach their fullest potential. Family relationships are established by culture and must be respected. Family unity is nurtured when everyone cares for each other, morally support and stand up for each other.

Parents and the extended family play a special role in the family that must be respected and valued by each member of the family. Some family members are granted privileges because of their position in the family, e.g. eldest brother and sister, grandparents, and aunts and uncles.

- Engage in many one-to-one, face-to-face, gentle and supportive interactions.
- Frequently talk with, sing to and read to infants and young children.
- Actively listen to children and teach them to listen to others while together you describe an event, negotiate a social problem, or work out a solution.
- Engage in positive storytelling about the family or about children's experiences.

Strengthen your children's self-concept and positive identity as a contributor to the family and the community. A strong cultural affiliation strengthens a child's self concept and positive identity.

- Be positive in your interactions: A child's self concept is fragile and can be affected by adult perceptions and actions.
- Encourage and love children: A child who lives with criticism and fear learns to ostracize and devalue others.
- Value and display the artwork and stories of children. Pictures can be hung on the wall at heights that children can see.
- Provide opportunities for children to appreciate the work of others in the family and to appreciate art, books, plays and performances outside the

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home.

- Provide opportunities for children to talk, listening carefully and offering well-placed expansions to their sentences to enhance meaning.
- Help children develop a sense of themselves as initiators of action and competent actors.

Provide an oral language and print rich environment. Children learn new words at a far more rapid rate – almost 20 words a day – when their language and print environment is sufficiently rich in vocabulary (Berk, 1996).

- Consider your home, and in particular the children's rooms, as places of learning.
- Each room in the house has a special purpose. Have specific guidelines that apply in the use of each room. Children see the furnishings and decorations and associate certain actions with each room or furnishings.
- Expand upon children's conversation and prolong conversation with them.
- Plan walks and excursions that expand opportunities and experiences. Memories linked to new words provide categories and structures to which children can readily connect what they are learning.
- Foster positive interaction, conversation and collaboration, thus promoting language development, problem solving, and perspective taking.

Build a strong vocabulary base. What the family does on a daily basis, vacations and trips that the family takes, and the expressions of affection and emotion, all constitute rich opportunities for vocabulary development.

Vocabulary building can be both an unconscious and conscious effort. Vocabulary associated with actions and relationships becomes integrated into the functional vocabulary of the children. A word is remembered at three levels: awareness, application and evaluation levels.

- Take every opportunity to take children to the application level whenever possible. The word may be too abstract for a child's level but must become a part of the family vocabulary.
- Involve children in routine tasks, like measuring ingredients for cooking, observing the environment and recording changes in temperature. These interactions set a strong base for building later reading and math skills.
- For younger children, teach them how to link ideas with words like: but, because, when, after, until and before.

Practice good study habits with your children.

- Engage in conversation about learning. Research shows this strengthens children's abilities to communicate, express themselves, understand, reason and solve problems (Wells, 1983; Wilkinson, 1984; Nelson, 1985; Chang-Wells and Wells, 1993; Cobb, Wood and Yackel, 1993; Palincsar, Brown and Campione, 1993).
- Create spaces for quiet reading and learning in your home and encourage times of quiet play or study by themselves.
- Provide a good example for children to see other family members enjoying a variety of books, magazines, writing, studying and spending quiet times in taking care of family business or record keeping.

Parents are an important resource for teachers because they have valuable information about their children that is essential in planning meaningful educational experiences. Teachers who take advantage of parents as a resource see the benefits of expanding on assets and strengths that children already bring to school.

Encourage and develop higher order thinking skills.

- Ask thought-provoking questions, adding complexity to tasks.
- Play games that involve classifying objects for a purpose, such as animals, plants, wheels and gears.
- Teach children that words can have multiple meanings. The ability to take multiple points of view vastly expands communication skills.
- Focus on several aspects of a problem at one time and reverse children's thinking. Mentally go through a series of steps and then reverse them, for example, subtraction can undo or reverse addition.
- Talk about past, current, and future events so that children can learn how to sequence and reason about concrete and abstract concepts (Thornton and Vukelich, 1988; Barton and Levstik, 1996).

Plan with your children's teachers your home approach to developing literacy skills. When children sense that teachers respect and value their families, this supports their own sense of self-esteem and competence.

- Set goals and celebrate learning, sharing with all who are involved.
- Help children plan, anticipate, reflect on, and revisit their own learning experiences.
- Recognize developmental accomplishments.
- For young children, develop print awareness by listening to and read-

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ing stories and poems, experimenting with writing and drawing, copying, and using their own invented spelling.

- Draw on children's curiosity and desire to make sense of their world. Motivate them to become involved in interesting reading and learning activities.
- Encourage dispositions to learning in the home that will strengthen what is learned at school, such as humor, curiosity, and helpfulness (Katz and Chard, 1989).
- Help children create their own stories and write them down to be read and enjoyed by the family.
- Use humor, jokes, tongue-twisters, puns and riddles to encourage language skills.
- Ask your child to describe something, explain how a task was done, or how something works.
- Write down simple words or phrases. Make a game where you tape these up and see if a child can recognize them. Use words that are meaningful to them (such as their names, names of friends or pets, phrases like "I love you," and commonly seen functional words like "exit").

Read and discuss books geared to children's interest and reading levels.

- Bring a variety of interesting books, magazines and print material into the home.
- Have picture books and storybooks in the home that show people of different ages, racial and cultural groups, family types, and abilities or challenges.
- Encourage children to pursue interests or hobbies in depth to support concept development. Children can develop "expertise" in areas that are of intellectual interest to them – rocks, dinosaurs, horses, state flags – the habits of mind they develop from deep study in one area are applicable to learning in other areas (NAEYC, 1997).
- Plan a fun visit to your local library or a bookstore and spend time with your child selecting good books together.

Children need to acquire not only the mechanics of reading and language arts, but also the desire to read and a love of learning.

Provide opportunities for children to teach the family information that they have learned in school or from other sources, such as friends, books, magazines and television. Children will demonstrate their learning strategies by using them when trying to teach a lesson. Teaching allows children the opportunity to learn concepts and processes at a deeper level.

- Encourage home plays or dramas where children create and act out simple roles, scenes, routines or comedies. These can strengthen children's memory, language, logical reasoning, imagination and creativity.

Make choices together on television programs and books to strike a balance between programs for enjoyment, such as cartoons and educational programs.

- Practice consensus building at home, such as setting rules and agreeing on activities.
- Give children an opportunity to ask questions for clarification or respond with their own ideas in conversations with family members.
- Ask children to remember and tell the sequence of stories.
- Limit access to television programs that depict violence.
- Teach alternatives to aggression for resolving conflicts by communicating needs and feelings verbally.

Provide opportunities for family meetings where each child contributes and discusses concerns.

- Encourage children to express their thoughts and share their feelings. Take children's ideas seriously.
- Help children understand the viewpoints of others.
- Support social and emotional development that will help children work and interact effectively with peers and have a sense of "industry" (Erikson, 1963).
- Seize opportunities for problem-solving and discussions that allow children to speak, create and apply their knowledge and understanding as they grow.
- Help children express strong emotions constructively and maintain positive relationships with others.
- Reason with children and help them to understand the rationale for the rules they follow.
- Set clear limits and intervene to enforce consequences.
- Teach concepts of fairness and rules of interaction, discuss action-results-consequences.
- Help children develop empathy in their interactions with others and better peer relationships.

Use the Internet to seek information and resources to use with your children.

- Learn for yourself how to use the Internet before teaching your child how to use it.
- Take time to see what your children are interested in and what they are doing online.

Provide opportunities for your children to use the computer and other technology.

- Use developmentally appropriate software, such as ClarisWorks for Kids, and allow children to explore computer experiences.
- Plan time for you and your children

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to learn and apply computer technology together.

Balance the use of media with personal interaction.

- Plan times for family interaction and sharing of ideas.
- Do not let television, rather than family or teachers, define values and priorities for children.
- Take time to foster manners and morals.
- Use common sense to limit the access to violence that is depicted on television, in movies, and in video games. Thousands of research studies show the negative effects of such exposure on children.
- Promote ethical behaviors, such as trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring, and citizenship.

Encourage a bilingual environment. Research supports the benefits of bilingualism in cognitive, language, and literacy development. Bilingual children perform better than monolingual speakers on measures of analytic ability, concept formation, and cognitive flexibility.

- If your family speaks Spanish and English, use bilingual skills. Encourage bilingual education in schools. Abrupt submersion in an English-only environment can create a risk of "semi-lingualism," or inadequate proficiency in both languages, especially among low-income Hispanic children (August and Garcia, 1988).
- Have books with languages other than English in the home or visit your library or local bookstore to expose your children to written print material other than English.
- Listen to radio or watch television programming other than English, and encourage children to hear and value diversity in culture expressed through speech and language.

Working Together

This article has touched upon the informal learning in the home and in the community with supportive adults that can complement formal instruction at school. Families and teachers working together can foster important reading and math skills for school success and lifelong learning. In setting high expectations and offering focused support, teachers and families can set the stage for children to do the following:

- Become avid and good readers,
- Enjoy problem solving and mathematics,
- Speak and write correctly,
- Make independent and sound decisions,
- Develop good study habits,
- Have self-confidence,

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Resources on Developing Language Skills at Home

American Association of Family and Computer Sciences. *Developmentally Appropriate Practice in School-age Child Care Programs*, second edition (Alexandria, Virginia: American Association of Family and Computer Sciences, 1993).

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The Home *– continued from Page 11*

- Get along well with others, and
- Enjoy learning and the school experience.

It is essential that families and schools work together to support student success at every level throughout their education, from pre-school through higher education. Children need to acquire not only the mechanics of reading and language arts, but also the desire to read and a love of learning.

It is also essential that loving adults support young people in applying their learning to solve problems throughout their lives both in the classroom and eventually through active civic engagement with their families and communities.

For more information on tools to help schools and families work together more effectively for student success, contact IDRA to learn about the Community Engagement Toolkit for families and schools (210-4441710; www.idra.org).

Resources

See boxes on Page 11 and below.

Abelardo Villarreal, Ph.D., is the director of the IDRA Division of Professional Development. Rosana G. Rodríguez, Ph.D., is the director of the IDRA Division of Community and Public Engagement. Comments and questions may be directed to them via e-mail at comment@idra.org.

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Early Childhood *– continued from Page 2*

story is going to be about. The students share their pictures with the rest of the class, and the pictures are posted on the wall.

As the teacher introduces the book, he or she shows the students the book cover and points out the title, the author, and the illustrator. After the children have heard the title and seen the picture on the cover they are asked to compare the illustration on the book with their illustrations. The key questions must lead the students to a prediction. Most of the time, the students are very close to predicting what the book will be about based on the questions and their group drawings.

This pre-reading activity makes the children feel successful and leaves them with the desire to continue listening to the story. The pre-reading activities stimulate their curiosity. The children want to find out for themselves if their group predictions are right, which most of the time are.

Reading the Story

The first reading should be done without stopping so that the students can appreciate the story uninterrupted. Once the students have listened to the story for the first time, they are ready to process the story. The children are then asked to discuss with their partner what they noticed about the characters in the story. This allows students to share their observations of the story. The students share with the group as the teacher writes their responses on a large piece of paper.

The students then are asked if there is anything they wonder about. The children may wonder for example why a particular character acted in a certain manner or why certain events happen in the manner that they do. The children then make connections to real life. They may relate to a particular character in the story. The story may also remind the children of other literature they have heard.

This pre-reading activity makes the children feel successful and leaves them with the desire to want to continue listening to the story. The pre-reading activities stimulate their curiosity.

The children are then asked to think about why the author wrote such a story. What is the lesson being taught through this story? How would the ending of the story change if certain aspects were to be changed?

Follow-Up Application

After a long discussion, the students still want more of the literature, and it is at this time where the story can be extended to other areas of study. In early childhood, the story can easily extend into the arts. Introducing a song that might be related to the literature can help reinforce the concepts being taught. The children might want to draw a poster about the book and display it in the hallway or in the library. When children can draw a picture of what they have listened to, they are demonstrating comprehension skills.

It is interesting to watch and listen to the children retell the story in their own words. The students learn the process of summarization through recounting the story while leafing through the book. Even though the children are not really reading, they are pretending to read. They are imitating what they have seen modeled by the teacher. Children who pretend to read at this early age are more likely to become successful readers later (Burns, Griffin and Snow, 1999).

Stimulating Interest in Reading

The middle school IDRA Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program students who stated that they felt forced to read their books in order to complete assignments are perhaps not being motivated to read. They do not see the purpose for reading and therefore do not know what it is they are looking for. Their curiosity is not being stimulated and thus, they find it meaningless to read. In order to better prepare our children for school and instill in them a love for reading and learning, appropriate and culturally diverse literature must be presented early on.

Recently, a babysitter was asked to watch a three-year-old girl for a few hours. The sitter arrived at the home expecting to sit and watch television and play games, but instead was treated to two hours of reading and playing house.

The three-year-old decided she would go to her room and did not want to be followed. The sitter told her she could go to her room but she had to leave the door open. After hearing a thump, the sitter went to investigate. The little girl said she was reading and had dropped some of her books. The sitter then asked her if she would read aloud.

The little girl was so excited she jumped off her small rocking chair, came to the living room and asked the sitter to sit in the couch. The little girl sat close so that the sitter could see the pictures as she read. She first showed the book cover and read the title of the book. She carefully turned each page after she recited the words, which she has heard over and over. As she read each page, her small index finger pointed to the words. After she finished reading the book, the sitter asked the little girl where she had learned to read so well, and she said, "My daddy reads to me."

This young reader was demonstrating how someone special in

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her life has modeled reading. At three years old she is demonstrating that children who pretend to read at this early age are more likely to become successful readers later (Burns, Griffin, Snow, 1999). Again it is the positive experiences that children have that determine whether or not they will become successful readers.

Resources

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Note: The IDRA Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program is an internationally-recognized cross-age tutoring program in schools across the United States and Brazil. Since its inception in San Antonio in 1984 until 2002, the program kept more than 11,500 students in school, young people who were previously at risk of dropping out. In this program, secondary students who are considered at risk of dropping out of school are placed as tutors of elementary students, enabling the older students to make a difference in the younger students' lives. Funded in part by The Coca-Cola Foundation, the program has made a visible difference in the lives of more than 136,000 children, families and educators. For more information, contact Linda Cantu at IDRA (210-444-1710) or visit the IDRA web site (www.idra.org). Information about IDRA's Project FLAIR is also available online or by contacting Rogelio López del Bosque at IDRA.

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Highlights of Recent IDRA Activities

In November and December, IDRA worked with **11,436** teachers, administrators, parents, and higher education personnel through **110** training and technical assistance activities and **278** program sites in **13** states plus Mexico and Brazil. Topics included:

- Math and Science Classroom Demonstrations
- Reading Comprehension Strategies
- Implications of School Policy
- Scientific-based Reading Research

Participating agencies and school districts included:

- Dallas Independent School District (ISD), Texas
- Albuquerque Public Schools, New Mexico
- Mission ISD, Texas
- Green Forest School District, Arkansas
- Harlingen ISD, Texas

Activity Snapshot

The STAR Center has collaborated with several education service centers across Texas to provide training for teachers and administrators on coordinated funding. The STAR Center is the comprehensive regional assistance center funded by the U.S. Department of Education to serve Texas. The sessions included the rationale for coordinating resources, a review of federal and state programs that can be coordinated in schoolwide programs, and a simulation of the coordination process using the STAR Center's innovative *Show Me the Money* game. The STAR Center is a collaboration of IDRA, the Charles A. Dana Center at the University of Texas at Austin, and RMC Research Corporation.

Regularly, IDRA staff provides services to:

- public school teachers
- parents
- administrators
- other decision makers in public education

Services include:

- training and technical assistance
- evaluation
- serving as expert witnesses in policy settings and court cases
- publishing research and professional papers, books, videos and curricula

For information on IDRA services for your school district or other group, contact IDRA at 210-444-1710.

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La Semana del Niño

Early Childhood Educators Institute™

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- Visit model early childhood centers. These visits provide you with the opportunity to share ideas while seeing them in action. You will travel to high-performing, high-minority sites in the San Antonio area that are working effectively with diverse learners.
- Interact with parents to discuss ideas to form effective learning partnerships.
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Curriculum and Pedagogy

Wednesday
Features of Quality Programs

Thursday
Family and Community

Contact IDRA (210-444-1710) or visit the IDRA web site (www.idra.org) for details and registration information.

Institute Sponsors

The Intercultural Development Research Association is pleased to bring you this Tenth Annual IDRA *La Semana del Niño* Early Childhood Educators Institute. Supporting IDRA projects include:

- IDRA South Central Collaborative for Equity (the equity assistance center that serves Arkansas, Louisiana, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Texas).
- RE-CONNECT (the parent information resource center at IDRA that serves Texas), and
- STAR Center (the comprehensive regional assistance center that serves Texas via a collaboration of IDRA, the Charles A. Dana Center at the University of Texas at Austin, and RMC Research Corporation).

Each of these IDRA projects provides specialized training and technical assistance to schools. Information on how your campus can use these resources to improve instruction and assessment will be available at the institute, or by calling IDRA at 210-444-1710, or by visiting IDRA's web site: www.idra.org.

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